ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020
Outcome & Evaluation

The 2020 Accountable Now AGM took place virtually on 14 May with a turnout of **46 participants** representing **27 organisations**, hence being our highest-attended AGM yet. The virtual format has undoubtedly contributed to the high turnout, and has as well helped us avoid contributing significant GHG emissions.

The downsides were, of course, the missed opportunity to have unreplicable face to face interactions, and the drastic length reduction of the meeting. To mitigate these, the Accountable Now Secretariat organised an optional virtual networking session to allow participants to have informal conversations with peers, and another optional session on Reporting and Accountability on the 15 May, to create a space for learning and exchange on the reporting process.

Below we summarise the most important discussions of the day, to give participants and those who were unable to join the opportunity to get an overview from our first virtual AGM.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN CRISIS-OPPORTUNITY MODE

The Covid-19 crisis has had a huge impact on the work of CSOs: at the strategic level organisations have had to rethink their missions and strategies within the changing and uncertain context of the global pandemic and the scale and speed at which internal and external contexts for CSOs have been evolving, poses a great challenge for CSO accountability.

Considering this new context, there are some accountability related questions the session aimed to address: How can a continued dialogue with stakeholders be maintained? How do we make sure that people we work for and with are involved in the key decisions being taken and that affect their lives?

To address these questions, AGM participants discussed what CSOs are doing to overcome the challenges posed by this crisis. **Below some of takeaways summarised:**

- **Supporting CSOs staff and volunteers has been a priority: human resources staff have shifted efforts to support organisations' immediate needs. Mental health, especially for those based away from their families, has been an area where CSOs had to pay particular attention.**

- Maintaining the dialogue and engagement with stakeholders: increasing the frequency of online communications, when face to face interactions are not possible, and the use of new channels (e.g. whatsapp) are key measures to mitigate the risk of excluding the most vulnerable. WorldVision produced a [report](#) capturing youth views on the current crisis.

- Building trust from the public and internally: misinformation and rumors spread wider and faster online when in person communications are lacking. A proactive approach to communication and engagement with the public is needed to prevent misinformation. CSOs have developed specific channels (e.g. dedicated website or intranet sites) and Covid-19 specific communications to mitigate this risk. YWCA has produced [communication materials](#) on the COVID-19 targeted to women and children.

- Learnings sharing from the previous health crisis: although the scale was smaller for Zika, Ebola and other pandemics, CSOs are acting upon past lessons learnt and sharing those insights in an accessible format (e.g. 5 mins read short summaries).

- Collaboration with partners: CSOs have increased collaboration with other organisations, through alliances or partnerships, to discuss challenges and opportunities, and sharing learnings.

- Financial resources: the economic crisis is affecting donors, especially individual ones, and hence CSOs are seeing their financial support reduced. Moreover, face to face fundraising teams ceased activity in most of the world.

> Opportunities for how to enhance accountability were also discussed. Travel and mobility restrictions have made virtual interactions the new norm, helping CSOs reduce their environmental impact. Moreover this situation has been an opportunity to consider an online format for events that never before were thought of as being suitable virtually. Another opportunity has arised through new communication channels being used by CSOs, which are enabling them to reach out to a wider group of stakeholders.

PEER ADVICE GROUP LAUNCH

Our PAGs are tools for members to connect and work together on common challenges. During this year's AGM we launched two PAGs, available for all members to participate in over the Summer months. Find out what topics we will be diving into and see how you can get involved!

IMPACT MEASUREMENT

Amnesty International led the conversation in the Impact Measurement PAG focusing on the following questions:

- Whatever outcomes we achieve, they are always the result of multiple factors. How do we know whether our intervention was one of the critical factors contributing to such outcomes? And what cost effective ways do we have to understand that?

- **How do we make the link between outcomes that we achieve and the impact at societal level that we hope and what do we expect these outcomes will contribute to?**

Participants shared their insights and challenges. Sightsavers for example, shared their [Strategy, Implementation and Monitoring (SIM) card](#), a tool to monitor projects and link its objectives to strategic impact.

Safeguarding

Restless Development kindly helped us kick off the conversation by sharing their experience on reviewing their safeguarding mechanisms. In March 2019 they commissioned a review of their safeguarding operation to contribute to being fully transparent and accountable to the communities they reach. The review identified a consistent approach to safeguarding, recognising the flexibility to adapt to local needs and meet local safeguarding standards. Nonetheless, they used the opportunity to identify how to step up their work and continue strengthening their safeguarding practices.

Restless´ experience sets the tone for participants to reflect on how CSOs have enhanced their safeguarding policies, with procedures that strengthen the ways incidents are reported to make sure they are accountable when concerns are raised. In addition, CSOs should continue to push themselves further and ask, is this enough?:

- **Will more workshops and training be enough to prevent incidents?**

- **How do we make sure that the people and communities we work with are confident to complain and communicate any types of violations?**

- **How can we guarantee that safeguarding is not only a procedure but that it is part of our organisational culture?**

- **How can we adapt our safeguarding procedures to the diversity of CSOs (small vs big and service delivery vs advocacy oriented)?**

These are just some of the questions that we discussed at the AGM and that we wish to continue reflecting on in the next couple of months.

The PAGs are not over, their launch at the AGM was just the kick off and we are now continuing to assess our member's needs and how the PAGs might best contribute and bring resources to advance our member's both areas. If you are a member and want to join one (or both) PAGs please fill in the forms below:

SAFEGUARDING PAG

IMPACT MEASUREMENT PAG

The submission of Accountability reports by members and their review by the Independent Review Panel (IRP) are the basis for which we support member organisations to become even more transparent, more responsive to stakeholders, and to deliver even more impact.

Most Accountable Now member organisations have recently started to report under the new framework, which includes new reporting questions, new timelines and a slightly different review process. Likewise the IRP has recently started to review reports under the new framework and applying the new reviewing features such as scoring. Considering this historical context, Accountable Now secretariat and the IRP facilitated a Reporting and Accountability session to cover recent updates and open questions related to the new reporting process.

John Clark and Chilufya Chilese, the former and new IRP Chair respectively, facilitated the session, supported by other 4 panel members: Elodie Le Grand, Charlie Martial Ngounou, Simon Lawry-White, and Danilo Songco. Participants crowdsourced the topics the session should address. Here you can find the questions that participants posed.

In our discussion we wanted to acknowledge how the Covid-19 crisis is affecting the CSO sector as a whole, and therefore the accountability and reporting mechanisms as well. Therefore, Accountable Now's reporting expectations will be within the context of the Covid-19 crisis, this is the time for kindness and caring.

Reporting requirements and scope for federated organisations

There are several member organisations that have a federation-type structure and their approach to reporting is largely diverse. Some organisations focus on the international secretariat (or equivalent) and others focus on country or local offices. Accountable Now and the IRP, whilst acknowledging the diverse degree of control and influence the reporting entities might have, advises members to focus on the secretariats' role on ensuring that a particular accountability issue is addressed globally.

Incorporating the 'localisation' agenda within CSOs accountability processes

An accountability report should demonstrate that the member is connected to local communities, local partners and local governments, and how they actively listen to their input and feedback. Ideally, evidence of resources being transferred to these local entities should also be provided, and evidence of local feedback and participation is taken onboard within the CSO planning and accountability processes.

Scoring of reports

The scoring is only intended to assess the comprehensiveness and usefulness of the information provided by the report. Let's consider the IRP as a sample of the general population that read the report: in addition to the narrative feedback the IRP provides, this numerical feedback helps the member understand what is expected, how they are addressing a particular accountability issue (in the report!) and how it compares with other members.

On the Reporting and Assessment framework (p. 5), the criteria for scoring is spelled out, the IRP recognised that it is sometimes a challenge to agree on the score. This new feature is key to the production of the Accountability in Focus

reports, that delve into specific accountability topics, such as stewardship of the environment, or partnerships, and aim to identify trends in the sector.

Multiple reporting

Some Accountable Now members are using other accountability standards, the most common being the Core Humanitarian Standard, which is used by 9 Accountable Now members. CSOs resources should be used wisely and efficiently, and that includes resources used for accountability and reporting. Accountable Now is working on understanding the potential duplications and how the different standards might complement each other, with the ultimate objective of reducing the 'accountability burden' for members.

New reporting framework

The new framework addresses much more centrally the core issues of accountability from CSOs perspective, and it is aligned with the dynamic accountability concept. How can we demonstrate dynamic accountability from policy to action? Whilst it is still a challenge, Accountable Now is receiving more and more reports that give evidence of not only strong policies, but also concrete and robust processes and mechanisms. In our good practice library, examples from member organisations are published.

EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK RESULTS

21 AGM participants provided their valuable inputs on the SurveyMonkey. For a quick overview of the responses, please access the dashboard.

Most respondents (95%) were satisfied or very satisfied overall with the AGM.

Overall assessment of AGM:
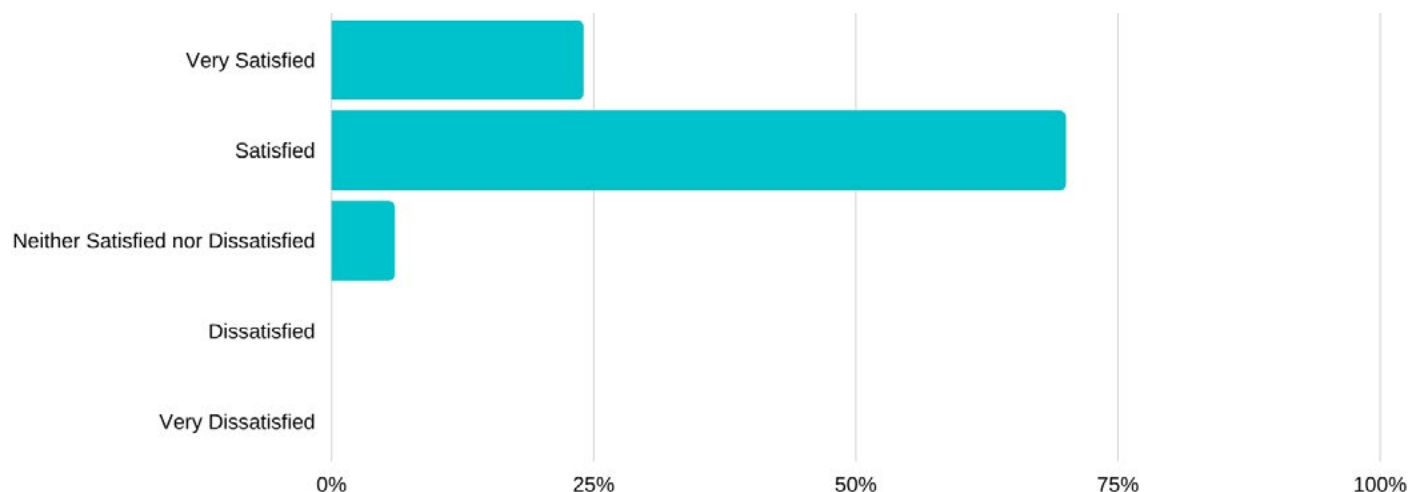
When asked what we should change that would make the AGM more relevant and interesting, respondents noted the following:

"Perhaps it would have been useful to just have a brief introduction to who was 'in the room', which organisation they were from, etc."

"It might be interesting to have a member briefly present a good practice, lesson learned or success story of how their organization dealt with a challenging issue or improved over time."

"an open and off-the-record discussion about the main challenges in the governance of AN's members"

"Give more time for the thematic session."

"Increase the number of topical conversations. There may have been only two due to time, increase to probably to have three. Thank you."

"Maybe a guest speaker with expertise on future trends in sector."

Virtual networking session:

Since this optional session was a first timer, we explicitly asked participants how they felt about the networking session. Out of the total respondents, 18 had participated in this session and 15 were satisfied or very satisfied.
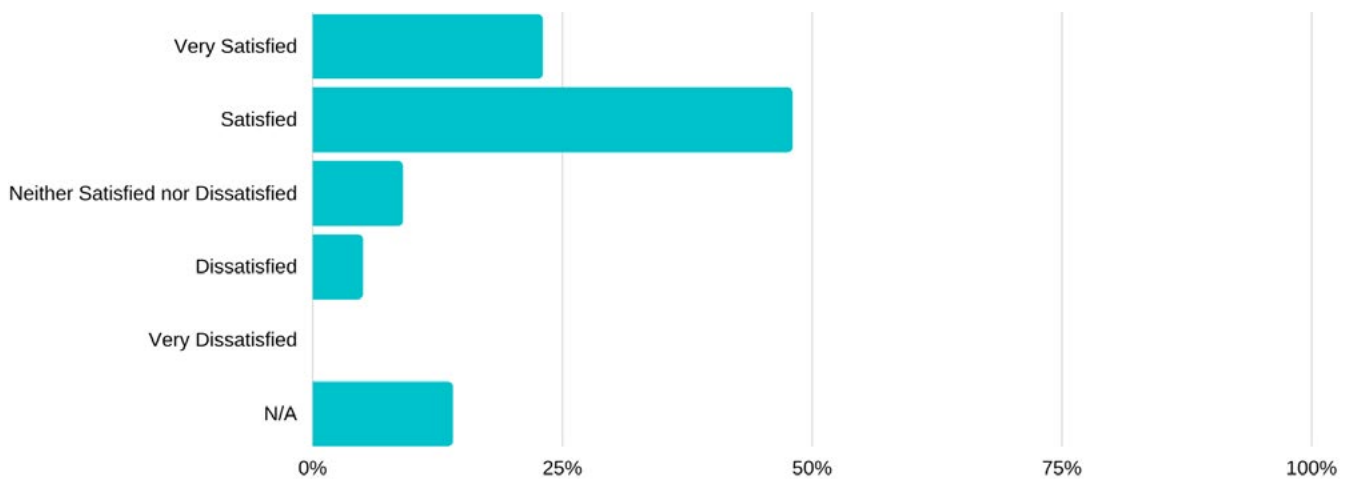

Some of the participants recommendations included:

"increase the number of participants per break out session"

"It would have been nice to mix up the groups once or twice, to be able to chat to different people, although I understand that logistically this would perhaps been difficult..."

Accountability in crisis-opportunity mode discussion:

This discussion was the core of the AGM, and the main challenge was to find the right balance between framing the conversation with enough context, and delving into specific accountability related issues. We asked participants how well the discussion related to their level of expertise and knowledge. Most survey respondents (60%) noted that the conversation was within their level of expertise and knowledge.
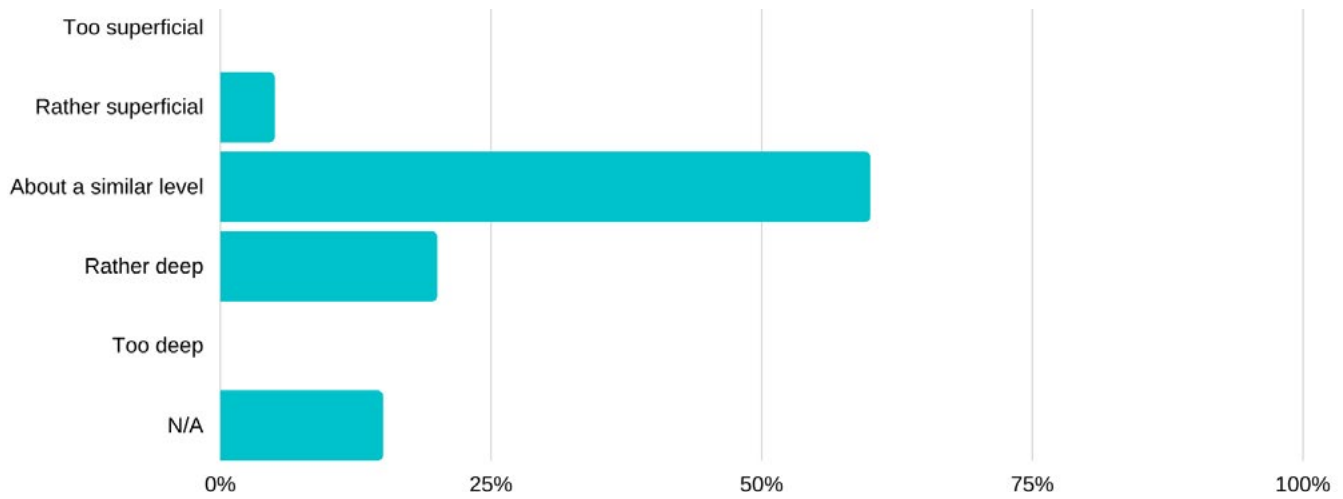
What will we do differently next time?

- Participants will know (preferably in advance) who else is in the room.
- We will reshuffle groups once or twice in the virtual networking session, so that participants will have a chance to interact with more peers.
- We will allocate more time for the thematic discussions.
- Coordination and technical support will be enhanced, so that technical issues are prevented.
- We will explore different approaches to members' participation, e.g. good practices sharing sessions.